

4. Memoirs of a Yorkist Civil Servant: A Comment

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DR. A. J. POLLARD'S excellent review of the new edition of the *Crowland Chronicle Continuations* edited by Pronay and Cox in the March 1987 issue of *The Ricardian* contained a suggestion that may have been very welcome to some of the journal's readers. Accepting the editors' view that the author of the Second Continuation wrote about Richard III in terms 'of bitter condemnation, close to hatred', Pollard suggested that this may have been because the author, writing in April 1486, had already swallowed the official line being put about by Henry VII. 'We have', he writes, 'an unresolvable dilemma here. His account could be an entirely independent view of Richard III; on the other hand it could equally be coloured by the victor of Bosworth's propaganda. There is no way of telling which.'¹

Up to a point this may well be true, but the matter should not be left there. If the author had indeed swallowed the official line, we would still have to ask why. He might have done so out of conviction because he believed the official line to be substantially true; or he might have done so in order to please the new regime; or for a mixture of both reasons. But, as the editors pointed out, there is nothing the Second Continuation resembles less than an account written to please the new regime. 'For a start, more than half of it deals with the period before Edward's death; if it has a hero it is Edward and not Henry whose family and name do not occur at all during that part. In the solitary instance where there is a reference to an event in which Henry Tudor's family and people had played a part, the battle of Mortimer's Cross, they are not even mentioned by name, merely as "the Queen's supporters in Wales . . . those worthless enemies over whom the teenage Edward won a famous victory". Henry VII would not have been amused'.²

The author's attitude to the Tudors suggests that even if he did choose to repeat an official line on Richard III then it is unlikely to have been because he wanted to parade his loyalty to the new regime. Why then did he dislike Richard III? In this context the editors' convincing confirmation of the traditional view that the continuation was written by an 'insider' — if not by the Protonotary Henry Sharp then by someone remarkably like him — is clearly important. More than two years before April 1486 other 'insiders' had also come to take a

hostile view of Richard III. Indeed the old Yorkists who joined the revolt of the autumn of 1483 were hostile enough to be prepared to risk life and limb and forfeiture of estates in their determination to express that view. Unfortunately for Richard the defeat of their rebellion did not mean the end of the attack on his reputation. In January 1484 his title to the throne was set out in parliament in the hope of 'quieting men's minds', putting an end to 'all doubts and seditious language'. In March 1485 he was forced to make a public denial of the allegation that he had poisoned his wife in order to marry his niece, an allegation put about by 'long saying and much simple communication among the people'. As the editor of this journal has pointed out elsewhere, Richard III's 'failure' lay in 'the loss of reputation'³ and, as these incidents and phrases make clear, Richard's loss of reputation began not with an official line peddled after Bosworth, but with the unofficial, indeed the anti-official, line put about during the summer of 1483. When, in April 1486, a 'Yorkist civil servant' came to write his history of these years in terms hostile to Richard III, it is surely because he was continuing this 'insider' tradition, not because he was naively or self-seekingly swallowing an official line.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. *The Ricardian*, vol. 7, no. 96, March 1987, p.383.
2. Pronay and Cox, p.27.
3. Anne F. Sutton, A Curious Searcher for our Weal Public: Richard III, Piety, Chivalry and the Concept of the 'Good Prince' in P. W. Hammond (ed.), *Richard III: Loyalty, Lordship and Law*, London 1986, p.78.

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